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THE TRUTH OF EFFIGIES

BY GUTZON BORGLUM

WEBSTER tells us that everything in the world is either Nature or Art, and some wag has added that a "potato is the simplest form of Nature and a boiled potato the simplest form of Art."

Was Lincoln an expression of Nature or was he a product of Art? Was he some strange national expression of the new force of our young nation, splendid in native efficiency, suddenly called to play its Premier; or was he broken in body, uncertain in mind, uncouth, unkempt, a victim of circumstances, unsuited to the formal confines of official and executive life; or was he another Greek, born out of age and time?

Shall he be studied and interpreted as a product of brutal realism, emphasizing rudely the body of poverty and its attendant ills? Or shall he be edited into the temple with the ancients and there sit with the powdered periwigged age he eclipsed? This is the kernel in the nut critics have tried to crack in the past two months, discussing the fitness and also the formula for sculptured portraiture of our great.

"Our Great"—the phrase, it seems, should shape an artist's course. Unfortunately the former are rarely known as great by the living nor accurately studied by those who could give us true portraiture. When they have passed they become the legitimate property of the various schools of expression and it is rare that so great an artist as Hawthorne should have stayed his hand and noted when he saw Lincoln:

"I dare not draw him, the artist in me is too strongly tempted by the picturesque." Lesser souls handle our great with shovel or with finer tool, according to their personal training or adherence to school, and we must in studying the latest effigy of Lincoln realize that school and technical treatment of texture are responsible for the result, rather than any definite conception of that great man. The Cincinnati effigy is an extremely interesting life study, so faithful in its modeling that it carries infirmities of the model, poverty of his mixed suit, and strange decrepitude of feet, limbs and shrinking body. Had the world seen the strange wreck and accoutrement used as model they would have seen how true the artist had been to the subject in front of him.

Lincoln, in his day, was the victim mainly of ridicule and caricature. There is extant a mountain of the grossest misrepresentation of him, yet there is not a President (save Roosevelt) of whom such excellent photographs exist. Of Lincoln, because of the thirty or forty, half are marvels of definition and show a sitter unconscious of the camera and full of his character. Of Roosevelt, because of the impossibility of escaping from the camera, ever present in our intensive age.

Lincoln has, however, not without some reason, appealed to the schools of our age. He has definitely been sought by the votaries of the realistic, because of the liberties this school enjoys. But this latest memorial is the first in which he has attained broken, club feet, sprung knees,

trousers that are years older than the borrowed coat. Nor have we seen him before with hands that seem to comfort a body cramped in chronic complaint.

To those who are interested, continue the study to the top of this strange grotesque. The treatment does not change—collar, neck, what there is of chin, and face are the subject of the same study shown in the extremities.

And this school of art has definitely its place and value. Were it not for this merciless brutality, overstepping into coarseness unfortunately in this statue, the opposing school of ideality would degenerate in formless, meaningless symbols of impossible attainment.

Against this school of realism stands the older—older in that it is more mature, but for that reason not necessarily more nearly right. It is opulent, vigorous in its volume of following. It has dealt little with Lincoln. He is not ancient enough; he is not remote enough, and he is still remembered and remains a living and beloved reality. I mean the Academic school of thought—that group of minds who measure and reason by compass and plumb-bob their way into happiness. Whose very brains seem manicured, who fear nature, force, individuality, or independence, who live in any and every age but their own, who dress, think and act in studied form and who bury their souls with mummied Egypt, formal Greece, or insolent Rome, as their laborious training predetermines.

This school of decay, of parchment, and of the long dead, is now reaching for the great figure of the Middle West, so they are building an ancient temple for him in Washington. Not a single word of tenderness has escaped them, not a group in all our great land seems even interested, yet they have heaved up a little hill in the Potomac mud flats, or will, around their

antique forms, of the purest white marble deep dug from Colorado, and there in all his loneliness this first great soul who worked, labored, trusted enemy and friend alike, and saved for us representative government, will sit alone, separated from all he cared for, anchored to all his worn heart hated.

But George Washington is the best example of what artificiality of thought and art can do to a real man. Recently I sat with a half-dozen of the most vigorous men in America and they agreed that it would require an Act of Congress to restore true portraiture of the Father of his Country.

Meantime what happens? Carlyle once said he was a poor man but he would give half of all he possessed if some honest sculptor of his day had drawn a true portrait of Jesus Christ, that he might see just what manner of man he was. Few realize what this means and fewer realize how few mighty builders of portraits the world has had. There have been fewer great portraitists in sculpture and painting in our entire history than there are fingers and thumbs on two hands. The Greeks had one, the Romans none, the Italians perhaps two, Spain one, Holland two, France one (Rodin)—and now I'm getting into the dangerous age.

The present discussion has been one of the most useful and instructive that has involved Art in America, although most of it has been out of order, as it is presumptuous of any group of citizens to assume a nation's prerogative and present to a foreign country a national gift without the nation's consent. The American artists assembled seem to have answered the question as to what is in line with national dignity—that is, that any work of art which shall be or assumes to be a national gift to another nation shall be authorized by the nation.



JOHN RUSKIN

An example of the monumental work of Gutzon Borglum, showing sympathy, insight and a complete mastery of the artist's medium